

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY JIDDA NIACT IMMEDIATE

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S E C R E T STATE 042372

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, SA

SUBJECT: BEGIN'S STATEMENT ON F-15 SALE TO SAUDI ARABIA

REF: RIYADH 118

1. FEBRUARY 16 "WASHINGTON POST" CARRIES ARTICLE WITH
LEAD "PRIME MINISTER MENACHEM BEGIN DENOUNCED THE U.S.
DECISION TO SELL MODERN WAR PLANES TO EGYPT AND SAUDI
ARABIA AS AN 'OBSTACLE' TO PEACE TALKS YESTERDAY..."

2. ARTICLE LATER STATES QUOTE BEGIN SAID ISRAEL HAS
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 STATE 042372

LEARNED THAT SAUDI ARABIA HAD ALREADY PROMISED INTERNAL
QUOTE A CERTAIN ARAB STATE CLOSE INTERNAL QUOTE TO PUT
SAUDI ARMS AT ITS DISPOSAL IN CASE OF WAR WITH ISRAEL
AND THAT THE SALE OF F-15S, INTERNAL QUOTE THE MOST
ADVANCED PLANES ON EARTH CLOSE INTERNAL QUOTE TO SAUDI
ARABIA WOULD TURN SAUDI ARABIA INTO INTERNAL QUOTE AN
ABSOLUTE AND IMMEDIATE CONFRONTATION STATE CLOSE INTERNAL

QUOTE. BEGIN DID NOT IDENTIFY THE INTERNAL QUOTE CERTAIN ARAB STATE CLOSE INTERNAL QUOTE BUT, ACCORDING TO ISRAELI ARMY RADIO, HE WAS REFERRING TO EGYPT. OFFICIALS HERE WERE UNWILLING TO SAY HOW OR WHEN ISRAEL HAD GOTTEN THIS INFORMATION. CLOSE QUOTE.

3. YOU SHOULD BRING BEGIN'S STATEMENT AS QUOTED BY "WASHINGTON POST" TO SAG'S ATTENTION MAKING THE FOLLOWING POINTS:

-- AS WE PROCEED WITH THE F-15 SALE THERE WILL INEVITABLY BE ALLEGATIONS CONCERNING SAUDI INTENTIONS REGARDING THE USE OF THE AIRCRAFT.

-- UNDER SECRETARY BENSON (REFTEL) IN CALLING ATTENTION TO NEED FOR SUPPORTING EFFORT BY SAG HAS NOTED CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE WILL BE DISAGREEABLE. WE ARE PLEASED THAT FAHD HAS PROMISED SAG WILL NOT BE FAZED BY DEBATES.

-- WHILE WE ARE NOT SUGGESTING THAT SAG RESPOND TO EVERY CRITICISM OR ALLEGATION, THERE ARE OCCASIONS WE WILL NEED SAUDI COOPERATION TO CLARIFY CERTAIN AREAS CONCERNING THE SALE AND SAUDIS WILL APPRECIATE THAT QUESTION OF POSSIBLE TRANSFER OF SAUDI F-15S IS A PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE ISSUE.

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 STATE 042372

-- WE KNOW THAT THE SAG HAS GIVEN NUMEROUS GENERALIZED STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT TO THE ARAB CAUSE. WE KNOW TOO THAT THE SAG FULLY UNDERSTANDS THE PROHIBITION AGAINST TRANSFER OF U.S. ORIGIN WEAPONS SOLD UNDER FOREIGN MILITARY SALES WITHOUT U.S. APPROVAL.

-- IN THIS CONTEXT WE WOULD LIKE TO HAVE SAG'S REACTIONS TO BEGIN'S STATEMENT.

-- WHILE NOT SUGGESTING AT THIS TIME THAT THE SAG ISSUE A PUBLIC STATEMENT, WE NEED TO BE ABLE TO GIVE THE CONGRESS RENEWED ASSURANCES THAT THE SAG INTENDS TO USE THE F-15 FOR ITS OWN DEFENSE AND IN CONFORMITY WITH U.S. LAW GOVERNING FOREIGN MILITARY SALES.

4. FYI: AMB ALIREZA IS RECOMMENDING THAT SAG ROYAL BUREAU ISSUE A FIRM DENIAL THAT SAG PLANS TO TRANSFER ANY U.S.-ORIGIN EQUIPMENT TO THIRD COUNTRIES OR (REFERRING TO ANOTHER CHARGE) THAT SAG INTENDS TO HIRE MERCENARIES TO OPERATE ITS EQUIPMENT. VANCE

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